

Social Glue

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Square dancing are the bricks of any square dance club, but the mortar that hold the club together are the social bonds.

The bonding starts with the first beginner class. In class, they normally have one leader for several months. The dancers grow to trust the caller to take care of them and to not do dance material that they can't do. They form a social bond with the caller. They can understand what he or she says. Most dancers prefer to dance to one leader most of the time.

Then the dancers may be tossed to the wolves after graduation. In Modern Western Square Dancing, today, the callers move around from club to club. The new graduates are now expected to dance to many different voices and choreography. We lose a lot of new dancers in the first few weeks after graduation because the new dancers have not bonded with the club members and can't face the shock of also losing the caller who taught them to dance.

Most square dancers will never dance any place, but in their own club. Only a small percentage will ever go to a big local dance. An even small percentage will ever attend a national convention.

Some dancers quit because of social pressure. When we encourage clubs to steal the banner from another, club only a few of the clubs members will participate and some will quit the club rather than to be pushed or shamed into going.

Some facts to think about. Most social groups are made up of fewer than 60 people. Any more than that number and the social aspects of the club start to suffer. Sure it's

fun to go to a large dance once in a while, but most people really prefer to dance with people they know and trust.

For a lot of dancers, modern western square dancing just requires too much commitment. They don't have the time or energy to keep up with their friends and the frantic pace

Most dancers think of dances as strings of calls. They don't mind a few surprises, but don't push them too much. They would rather laugh with their friends than solve the most intricate puzzle any hot-shot caller can devise.

The average dancers does not think about what "basics" are called during a tip. I have watched callers at conventions use the same strings of calls for a singing call dance routine and, if the music is good, the dancers never complain.

The caller also doesn't have to use all the "Basics" on any list. Keep them moving and the dancers will be happy. They don't need practice, they need dancing. They want to leave the floor with their friends and who cares what you called.

At the beginning of the program, dancers also are hoping to dance routines they already know how to do. They need to warm up their brains. To do this, they need have a team of people in the square that they trust. The other dancers in the square need to move in a predictable manner.

The caller for the evening should use the first few tips to bond with the dancers. Before the caller can hope to have any success with anything special, you have to prove to the dancers that they can trust you to know what

they can dance. The dancers need to become familiar with your voice and with your delivery.

Between tips, the caller should be out on the floor trying to bond with the dancers. This is often hard at a large dance. There is just not enough time for the bonds of trust to build up. In smaller clubs you can learn quickly where the strength and weakness are.

Many SD clubs have special party or theme dances. It's up to the caller to work out any kinks between what the club has planned and what they have planned. What they have planned is far more important than what you have planned. They are trying to build up the social glue that makes their club successful.

If the caller is going to present any puzzles, it should be done during the middle part of the program. Start and end your program with material the dancers can easily be successful in dancing. I like to announce any tip where the material may be tougher.

Many square dance clubs have food available. This provides the dancers that do not want to dance every tip a place to go rather than sit in the hard chairs on the sidelines. The caller can contribute to the experience by keeping the tips short and start the next tip without begging dancers to get on the floor.

Many clubs have dinners before or after the dance. If you are the caller, it is well worth your time to attend these events. If you do attend, be sure you get around to speak to as many of the dancers as possible.

The goal is to provide as many places as possible for bonding to occur. It's much more important than the squares you call.